



Diving In: Exploring embodiment in a performance swimming lifeworld via becoming, remaining and doing

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Plan

- Brief overview of PhD study
- Present some results in relation to
 - Becoming and Remaining
 - Doing
- Hopefully begin to dispel the notion of swimming as being about plodding up and down a pool staring at the black line.

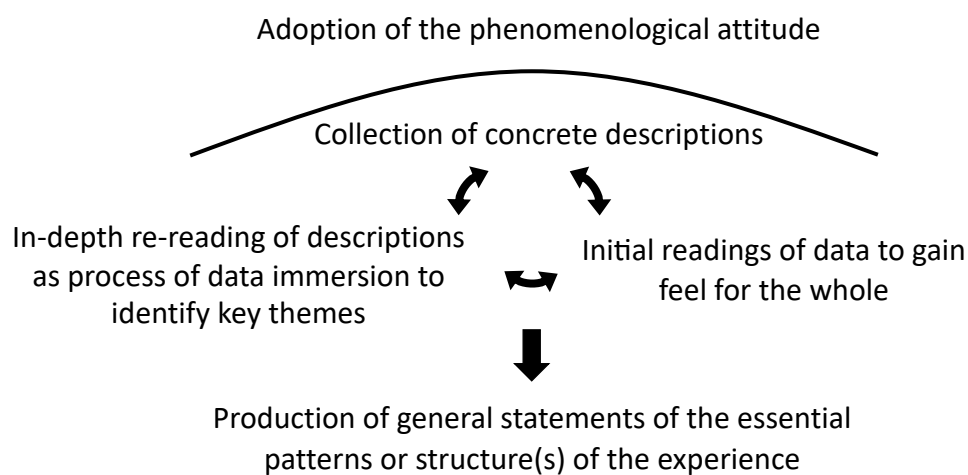
Why swimming embodiment?

- Swimming is a sport where embodied experiences have been shown to be core elements (Evans and Sleaf, 2012, 2015; Evans & Allen-Collinson 2016; Throsby, 2013, 2016)
- Studies of the embodied experiences of competitive swimming remain sparse, and tend to be critical sociological examinations of gendered relationships or training regimes (Grahn, 2016; McMahon & Penney 2013a, 2013b; McMahon & Barker-Ruchti, 2017), with limited attention being paid to the 'intense embodied experiences' of being a swimmer.
- My study therefore aims...
 - To develop an advanced understanding of the intense embodied experiences of training and competition, by investigating the sociological-phenomenology of competitive/performance swimming.

Methodology/Methods

- Giorgi's (1997) descriptive phenomenological method
 - Adopted phenomenological attitude via bracketing/epochē (McNarry, 2019)
 - Collected concrete descriptions
 - Participant Observation
 - 3, 5-week blocks - Role as a voluntary assistant
 - Interviews
 - Semi-structured - conducted during 1st immersion. Reviewed and developed during second immersion – 19 Interviews (12 male / 7 female; aged 18-22)
 - Group - conducted during 3rd Immersion - 3 Interviews (10 male / 6 female; aged 18-22)

Methodology/Methods



Becoming and Remaining

- Swimming as a sport = Greedy Avocation (Gillespie et al., 2002)
 - Up to and beyond 100km a week in the pool
 - Land work
 - Cost
- Immersion from early age – Lessons 2 to 5 / club 6-10 / Racing 9-11
 - Influence of parents and/or siblings

Becoming and Remaining

- Journeys not smooth – opportunities and challenges
 - Changes of clubs, coaches, breaks from the sport
- Continued participation – Love of the sport – Desire to push limits/succeed – Similar reported in other (endurance) sports
- Led to a swimming identity fundamentally grounded in what they do.



Becoming and Remaining

Yeah massively, I'd say, I'd say with any swimmer as well, but like especially me like at school, **I was 'the swimmer' like that's, that's, that's your identity**, erm to a lot of people, like you are a swimmer.

Erm and if I'm honest, I think that's why a lot of people continue swimming for as long as they do. Even though they say they hate it, it's because **they are scared of what their identity will be after swimming.**



Doing

- 'Doing' is a self-orientated project of perpetual improvement-focused embodied labour, accomplished reflexively and iteratively (Throsby, 2016).
- Malleability of the swimming body and idea of it being 'made', but the participants saw it as being 'born' and 'made' - genetic luck and embodied work.
- Key feature of this embodied work centred on the acclimation of swimming specific body techniques (Mauss, 1979)

Doing

- It's not just about being able to swim but being able to swim quickly – 'mindful swimming' – an active engagement in 'doing'.
- A form of 'dys-' (Leder, 1990) or 'eu-' (Zeiler, 2010) appearance whereby focusing on technique disrupted the everyday sub-conscious flow of the body.
- Recovery sessions body often returns to state of 'dis-appearance' (Leder, 1990)

Doing

- This idea of 'mindful swimming' and an active engagement in 'doing' highlights / adds weight to:
 - Phenomenological notion of mind-body-world nexus
 - Technique (Habit) presupposes a form of understanding that the body has in terms of operating within a certain world
 - Swimmer + world = questions that need resolving
 - Fluid and evolving nature of 'doing' in the refinement of skills/technique

Doing

"I like the fact that we are in water and that there is nothing stable about water. It's always moving, and it's the same with how you feel and how you approach every day. You have to just constantly keep changing the way you approach things"

Doing - Summary

- Active role of the embodied agent in the messy and complex reality of the practices involved in 'doing' performance swimming.
- Daily journey of embodied discovery and experimentation
- Requires constant monitoring and (re)evaluation of skilled movements and techniques

Take Home

- Swimming is not just plodding up and down the pool staring at the black line
- Swimmers have an active relationship with the sport, both in and out of the pool
- Paying attention to the corporeally grounded experiences of doing sport we can begin to understand the dynamics involved in the production of lived sporting body

Thank you for Listening



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